



## *The Insider*

[www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski](http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski)

### **Inside State Politics with State Senator Mickey Switalski Senate District 10**

**July 24, 2009**

Welcome to the electronic version of *The Insider*. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your support and giving me an opportunity to represent you in the Michigan Senate. It is my sincere hope that this bi-weekly e-newsletter will keep you informed of the happenings in Lansing while staying true to the traditional style of *The Insider*. If you would like to contact me, please feel free to e-mail me at [senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:senmswitalski@senate.michigan.gov) or call me at my Roseville or Lansing office. You can also meet me in person during my constituent hours, coming to a location near you. Call my office and make an appointment or just walk in. See the schedule below for details.

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### **Mickey's Blog: Downsizing Government: Why We Can't Cut**

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#### *Can Macomb Survive with Fewer Judges?*

Last month I got up one day on the Senate Floor and made a budget savings proposal to my colleagues. I suggested that we could begin downsizing government by not filling Circuit Court judicial vacancies when a judge turns 70 and can no longer run for re-election. Current law allows judges who turn 70 to finish their terms, but they cannot seek re-election. I figured with no incumbent, no one was losing a job, and that by attrition, we could begin to downsize the judiciary to a level we can afford.

It is clear to me that Michigan Government has to get smaller, and since there are 9 such judicial vacancies around the state in 2010, this would be a great time to begin. Each judge costs the state about \$140,000 in wages, so cutting out 9 would save the state over \$1 million. More importantly, at a time when we are cutting revenue sharing payments to counties, each judge costs the county about \$1 million, so the counties would save about \$9 million.

The following week, by chance, we were doing the Judiciary budget in the Senate, so I took advantage of the opportunity to introduce an amendment to the budget, saying that at the discretion of SCAO (the State Court Administrator's Office), and the affected County, that the state could delay filling judicial vacancies created when judges aged out of the system.

I showed my amendment to the Republican Floor Leader, who also chairs the Judiciary budget. He liked it immediately, and agreed to support its passage. My amendment passed easily on a voice vote. Two of these 9 vacancies are in Macomb County, where Circuit Judges Antonio Viviano and James Biernat are ineligible for re-election in 2010. Macomb County has a budget deficit of \$15 million, and that is after they raised taxes. So clearly the County must make some cuts, and this is an excellent place to start.

Opposition galvanized quickly. Senator Alan Sanborn (R-Richmond) led the opponents to my proposal, arguing that we should cut judges salaries or eliminate unspecified probate judges. Although he did not put his suggestions in the form of an amendment, the Senate Republicans agreed to remove my amendment the following day, on a party-line vote.

“Where are my fiscally responsible Republican friends?” I asked my colleagues. This is a concrete chance to cut government to the size we can afford, which all fiscal conservatives, both Republican and Democrat, agree must be done. I do believe Republicans agree with my idea in principle, but want more details and believe the policy will require statutory changes, which I admit are necessary. That’s why I proposed the bill to change the law in the first place. The budget is just a quicker way to accomplish the same goal.

I remain hopeful that my proposal will become law.

I believe some of the opposition rests on personal reasons. It is widely believed that siblings or offspring of judges Viviano and Biernat would have a good chance of winning an election succeeding their namesake. Let me go on record saying I like those individuals and I consider them my friends.

But whether they might win an election is no basis for making budget choices.

It should have nothing to do with it.

In any rational system, the decision to fill vacancies should belong to those people paying the bill. In this case that’s the counties (\$9 million) and SCAO (\$1 million). Shouldn’t they have the ability to say whether they want to fill openings, or delay filling them for 2 years so they can save money and balance their budget? Shouldn’t this always be their option?

Chief Judge Richard Caretti of the Macomb Circuit Bench is strongly opposed to my proposal. He has been quoted on the Senate floor and in the Macomb Daily as saying Macomb should have 5 more judges. I believe this is a fundamental misunderstanding of economic reality in the wake of the bankruptcy of GM and Chrysler. We have the highest unemployment in the nation. We cannot grow government—we have to shrink it.

We can’t fix Macomb County’s \$15 million deficit by adding \$5 million for new judges. We have to reduce government to what we can afford. It is abundantly clear that we can’t afford the 13 judges we already have. The Board of Commissioners has asked the Circuit Court to cut their budget by \$900,000. If they can’t get savings by not filling the impending vacancies, then they will have to do it by giving workers unpaid furlough days or by laying off 20 Friend of the Court clerks, child support investigators, referees, and other employees who actually make the Court function on a daily basis.

Judge Caretti suggested to Jameson Cook of the Macomb Daily that the 2 year delay in filling these positions would only save \$40,000 by eliminating a secretary. I don’t know how he came up with that number, but my figures come from estimates made by County Finance Director Dave Diegel, the man responsible for the budget.

And he says each judge costs close to \$1 million when you add up the costs of the Secretary, Court Clerk, Court Recorder, Court Officer, 2 Prosecutors, and all the operational costs. I don’t know about you, but I take my figures from the person responsible for paying the bills, not someone opposed to a policy change.

There are 13 judges on the Macomb Circuit Bench, and they held a vote on my proposal. Eight of them support delaying filling the 2 vacancies for at least 2 years. One was absent for the vote. That left Caretti, Biernat, and both Vivianos in opposition.

I try to make decisions that are good for the state. All I am saying is let the people paying the bill decide whether they can live with fewer judges. If they believe they can, they should be allowed to reduce government. This concept is supported by the State Court Administrators Office, the Michigan Judges Association, the Michigan Association of Counties, the Oakland County Circuit Court (which also has 1 such vacancy), and the majority of the Macomb Circuit Bench. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy has likewise asked the Governor to not fill vacancies on the Wayne Bench.

This isn't rocket science.

It is supported by anyone who wants to reduce government to what we can afford.

But it has not yet been adopted.

Why?

Because people have difficulty separating what is good for them personally as opposed to what is good for everyone.

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## **Mickey's Ends and Notes**

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### **ANSWER THE CALL FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE**

This summer, we are called upon to be part of United We Serve, an unprecedented national call to service to help Americans of all ages join together to address our communities' diverse needs. This is a call to make service to others a way of life, not just a day-long, week-long or summer-long event.

A new website has been launched to track volunteer opportunities, [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov). This movement is about more than just a single day of service - it is about committing to an ongoing ethic of service to our communities and taking ownership of the future of our state and nation. Organizations needing volunteers can register at the website to get matched up with volunteers. Citizens interested in volunteering can also visit Michigan's volunteer website, [www.michigan.gov/volunteer](http://www.michigan.gov/volunteer).

### **HELP IS OUT THERE: STATE AND LOCAL JOB PROGRAMS FOR JOB SEEKERS**

The recent Chrysler and General Motors bankruptcies mean that even more families will need job search and family assistance programs. There is a lot of help available for job seekers, but unfortunately many people don't know how to access these programs. I hope that readers will find the following information helpful. These programs are available for job seekers:

- Career Education and Workforce Programs (Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth). For job programs for veterans, people transitioning from welfare to work, specialized job placement programs, and dislocated/laid off worker assistance, visit the website at <http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1679---,00.html>.
- Rapid Response Program (Department of Energy, Labor and Economic Growth): 1-517-373-6234. This program begins when Rapid Response is notified of a plant closing or mass lay-off,

and helps people with their job search and new training they may need. Visit the website at [http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1678\\_2665---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/mdcd/0,1607,7-122-1678_2665---,00.html).

- The Macomb County Small Business and Technology Development Center provides counseling, training, research, and advocacy for new ventures, new start-up businesses, and existing small businesses. You can contact them at [SBTDC@macombcountymi.gov](mailto:SBTDC@macombcountymi.gov) or by calling 1-586-469-5118.
- Unemployment Insurance Agency. You may be able to file your claim either by phone or online. To file your claim by phone, call 1-866-500-0017. To file online, visit the website at <http://www.michigan.gov/uia/0,1607,7-118--77962--,00.html>. To inquire about your claim call 1-866-500-0017, and press 3. To find answers to general questions about unemployment benefits, and to print forms, log on to [www.michigan.gov/uia](http://www.michigan.gov/uia).
- Michigan Talent Bank: 1-888-253-6855. This site lists new job openings monthly and allows people to post their resume. Visit the website at: [https://www.michworks.org/mtb/user/MTB\\_EMPL.EntryMainPage](https://www.michworks.org/mtb/user/MTB_EMPL.EntryMainPage).
- The United Way of Southeastern Michigan. The United Way runs the 211 Help Line, which connects people with helpful services just as 911 connects people with emergency services. People simply dial 211 (or 1-800-552-1183) and use the United Way as their link to local and state programs. 211 can make referrals to agencies that can help with job training, rent, mortgage payments, and the cost of food or prescriptions. 211 is a lifeline for people in difficult situations trying to navigate their way through local and state programs.

## **STATE WARNS UNEMPLOYED WORKERS TO AVOID SCAM UNEMPLOYMENT WEBSITES**

The Michigan Unemployment Insurance Agency (UIA) is warning unemployed workers against using websites that charge fees to file their unemployment benefits claims. Officials also are telling workers to be wary of e-mails from websites that offer to set up direct deposit accounts for unemployment benefits. The UIA does not charge any fees to those filing claims for unemployment benefits, and it already offers direct deposit and debit cards as payment options for benefit payments.

The only website unemployed workers should use is the site that belongs to the state's Unemployment Insurance Agency at [www.michigan.gov/uia](http://www.michigan.gov/uia). The agency is aware of at least one website that is offering a pre-paid Visa card for those who have their unemployment benefit payments directly deposited onto the card. Michigan's website is fee free, and the state works closely with the well-know Chase Bank, which administers the direct deposit and debit card payment options. These filing sites show up when an individual searches for information on how to file for unemployment benefits, and charge up to \$20 to file an individual's unemployment claim. Many of these unofficial and fraudulent sites look official and may have a ".us" domain in their web address. Using these sites can delay a person's benefits and also puts the user at risk for identity theft. Unemployed workers should never enter their personal information for unemployment benefits onto a non-state-sponsored website.

## TIPS FOR PREVENTING IDENTITY THEFT

Identity theft is a serious issue and you can take many precautions to help reduce the risk of becoming a victim. These include reviewing your credit report annually, never giving out identifying information in response to a unsolicited offer unless you initiate the contact and when using the Internet, ensuring a website is a secure site by looking for an “s” in the address bar (https), among others. You can view additional tips on preventing identity theft as well as what to do if you have become a victim by clicking on the following link to a brochure provided by the Michigan State Police:

[http://www.michigan.gov/documents/ID\\_Theft\\_94764\\_7.pdf](http://www.michigan.gov/documents/ID_Theft_94764_7.pdf).

Additional information can be found at the Michigan State Police Identity Theft Unit website, located at [http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1589\\_35832---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/msp/0,1607,7-123-1589_35832---,00.html).

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## Coffee Hours

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\*In response to requests from constituents, I have added coffee hours in Roseville and during the daytime. Here are my next scheduled coffee hours. Please feel to stop on by or make an appointment by calling my office.

<b>July 27</b> <b>7-8 p.m.</b>  <b>Clinton-Macomb Public Library</b> (35891 South Gratiot) Clinton Township	<b>August 31</b> <b>1:30-2:30 p.m.</b>  <b>Senator Switalski's District Office</b> (31513 Gratiot, Suite B) Roseville
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## Mickey's TV Insider Show

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Check out my TV Insider Show coming to a television station near you. Watch me interview local guests about politics, life, issues and concerns to our district.

### **Sterling Heights**

Every Saturday and Sunday at 1 p.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Clinton Township**

Last week of every month- Sat thru Thurs  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Utica**

Every Wednesday at 9 a.m.  
(Comcast Channel 5/WOW Channel 10)

### **Roseville**

Various Times-check local listings  
(Comcast Channel 18/WOW Channel 10)

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## Contact My Office

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**Website:** <http://www.senate.michigan.gov/switalski>

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### Lansing Office

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